

REVIEWS

Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands, an Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Review by Christina Hellmich, Associate Curator of Oceanic Art, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts

THROUGH JANUARY 15, 2006, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is featuring a special exhibition of Marquesan art, *Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands*, which is drawn from the Met's collection and fifteen lenders. In his "Statement from the Marquesan People," in the catalog accompanying the exhibition, Toti Te'ikiehu'upoko celebrates the fact that a larger public will be introduced to the artistic achievements of generations of Marquesan cultural masters. The exhibition focuses on works of the 18th and 19th centuries with a goal of presenting "for the first time in an art museum an installation devoted exclusively to Marquesan works." (Kjellgren 2005:24). Eric Kjellgren, the Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Associate Curator of Oceanic Art at the Metropolitan curated the exhibition and authored the catalog with Carol Ivory, Professor and Chair of the Department of Fine Arts at Washington State University. The exhibition provides a visual feast with a critical mass of material sure to engage connoisseurs and neophytes alike.

The last major international show focusing on Marquesan art and culture, Trésors des Îles Marquises was organized in 1995 by the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. A much larger show, drawn primarily from French collections, the exhibition featured 150 works from the 18th and 19th centuries. A major catalog accompanying the exhibition included essays by eleven scholars. In 2003, The Mission Houses Museum in Honolulu, Hawai'i mounted the exhibition, *The Marquesas: Two Centuries of Cultural Traditions*. The last special exhibition to include Marquesan works organized by an art museum was *Art of the Pacific Islands* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1979. Consequently, the importance of the Met's exhibition in cultivating new awareness and enthusiasm for Marquesan art cannot be overstated.

The Metropolitan's exhibition brings together seventy-eight pieces drawn entirely from US (and largely East Coast) museums and private lenders, with the exception of one piece from The Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Twenty-six works, over a third, are from the private collection of Mark and Carolyn Blackburn. The display includes stunning pieces such as: a rare and elegantly shaped *kotuel* 'otue or lidded bowl; a bark-cloth effigy given to Lahainaluna School on Maui by Marquesan visitors in 1853; two carved wooden legs with tattoo patterns; *pu taiana/pu taiata* or ear ornaments; and eleven 18th and 19th century portraits of Marquesans by westerners. As the show focuses on sculpture and personal adornment articles, carvings of wood, bone and stone as well as feather work are prevalent. The early representations of Marquesans by Westerners add rich context to understanding how many of the pieces might have been worn on the head or body. Unfortunately, though such articles are mentioned several times in the

catalog text, there are no examples of tapa, such as *hami* or loincloths, slings, or other textile arts, either on view or illustrated in the catalog. However, three plaited fans with elaborately carved handles are included. Other adornment items such as the *koukau*, wood ear ornaments, clearly seen in four of the western views of Marquesans, would have been fascinating, given their rarity. Given that this is the first exhibition of Marquesan art in a U.S. art museum, it would have been interesting to draw objects from beyond North America. Certainly, European pieces such as the magnificent, complete set of stilts from the collection of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, that were included in the recent Gauguin show would have been fine additions to the Met's selection. Of course, budget limitations are a formidable challenge when it comes to special exhibition loans.

Kjellgren's essay in the illustrated catalogue outlines the history of the Marquesas and places the artistic traditions within their local and global cultural contexts. Carol Ivory's revealing catalog essay, "Art and Aesthetics in the Marquesas Islands," leads the reader beyond the works exhibited to the present artistic milieu. Her essay illuminates the representation of the human body in Marquesan art, the meaning and use of face and eyes in Marquesan art, and changes in Marquesan art from the 19th century to the present. Ivory illustrates the thriving art forms in the Marquesas today. The Mission Houses exhibition, *The Marquesas: Two Centuries of Cultural Traditions* co-curated by Ivory and Kimberlee Kihleng included works from the late 19th century to the present. While Kjellgren states that "the Marquesans ... are the original, and enduring, artists of the archipelago" (Kjellgren 2005:3), there are no 20th century or contemporary works included in the exhibition.

An institutional reluctance to accept these works completely on their own terms, and to truly see them as part of an artistic continuum can be felt in the forward and catalog jacket, both of which mention Paul Gauguin within the first paragraph. The Met has not overcome a long tradition, in art and natural history museums alike, of talking about Marquesan art in conjunction with Gauguin. Certainly, one cannot deny the importance of Gauguin in shaping western perceptions of Marquesan culture and art. However, the show will convince any visitor that Gauguin's appreciation (or that of other western artists and visitors) is not necessary to validate the aesthetic merits of Marquesan art. The rich visual array of complex carvings on sculpted surfaces, and the fantastic manipulation of materials that distinguishes Marquesan works will certainly make its own case for Marquesan art.

While other U.S. museums have recently renovated their permanent exhibition galleries devoted to Oceanic art, the Met is one of the only museums with a permanent collection to mount temporary exhibitions of Oceanic art in the last five years. The gallery is quite small. So, objects that could command it simply can't be offered more space in the current gallery configuration. Marketing potential and audience projections for Oceanic shows probably must rise substantially before the Met dedicates a large space to a temporary exhibition of art Pacific art, as it was to Te Māori over twenty years ago. Regardless, Eric Kjellgren and the Metropolitan Museum are to be congratulated for doing what few other American museums can boast: mounting special exhibitions (most recently,

focusing on the art of Rapa Nui and Te Henua 'Enana) with accompanying high quality catalogs that bring a national and international spotlight to Pacific cultures and their rich artistic masterworks.

REFERENCE

Kjellgren, E. and C. Ivory. 2005. *Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands*. New Haven and London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY and Yale University Press.

Diffusionism Reconsidered: Linguistic and Archaeological Evidence for Prehistoric Polynesian Contact with Southern California

Terry L. Jones and Kathryn A. Klar
American Antiquity, July 2005,
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Review and Discussion by Scott Nicolay

ONE OF THE MOST EAGERLY AWAITED PAPERS in anthropology is at last in print: Terry Jones and Kathryn Klar's case for transoceanic contact between Polynesians and the Chumash of southern California. It is appropriate that their paper should appear in an important venue as *American Antiquity*, as it has implications for the entire discipline of archaeology, extending beyond the two geographic areas upon which it focuses.

I will summarize the authors' ideas only briefly here, as it is not my purpose to rehash their entire thesis, but rather to discuss their paper and its implications. Basically, Jones and Klar argue that the Chumash sewn-plank canoe may be evidence for prehistoric contact with Polynesian voyagers. They suggest that Polynesians may have reached southern California, probably during the settlement of Hawai'i, and shared the secrets of the sewn-plank canoe and its construction. This is not an easy case to make, at least for legitimate anthropologists, as diffusionist arguments have long been considered the province of the "fringe" and not proper subject matter for anyone with a long-term interest in a career in the field. Jones and Klar deserve credit for their bravery in tackling the controversial issue of trans-oceanic diffusion with such diligence and professionalism and assembling such a thoroughly researched and well-constructed argument. They have given us a well-written, exhaustively researched paper, with a robust background presentation on all relevant areas, presented nonetheless in a manner both concise and clear. From now on, this paper should be held up as an example to those who seek to present such arguments without following the ground rules of the discipline. Those who cannot meet this standard do not deserve to be taken seriously. Jones and Klar definitely do.

Nota bene that this is not Heyerdahl's argument. Heyerdahl proposed the actual settlement of Polynesia from the Americas, and his case was based on a disassociated hodgepodge of "evidence" derived mostly from iconographic similarities; i.e. there are large statues on Rapa Nui with their hands folded over their stomachs; there are large statues in South America with their hands folded over their stomachs. And, of course, the back wall of Ahu Vinapu bears a superficial similarity to Inca stonework. Heyerdahl was an ultra-

diffusionist, who eventually went public with his claim that South America was originally settled from the Old World, and ultimately from northern Europe (his ubiquitous red-haired skeletons). Jones and Klar make a tightly focused case for only limited diffusion, with Polynesians as the active agents. That this happened in at least one other location is evidenced by the presence of the sweet potato in pre-contact Island Oceania, diffusion's only real smoking gun in the Pacific. Indeed, given our present knowledge of Polynesian navigation, it is likely that they visited every continent except Africa and Europe during their diaspora (and their Austronesians cousins who settled Madagascar obviously made Africa). But that is beyond the scope of Jones and Klar's paper: they argue for only a single voyage from eastern Polynesia to North America, and unlike Heyerdahl's scattershot approach, they focus their arguments almost exclusively on a single technology: the sewn-plank canoe.

Sewn-plank canoes are well documented in many locations in the Pacific, but only one other location in the Americas: the Gulf of Coronado in central Chile. Parallels exist not only between the canoes themselves, but also in the technology of their construction, suggesting actual cultural contact and not just the accidental discovery of an empty canoe by the Chumash. Most notable in this context is the perpendicular handheld adze, a distinctive component of the Polynesian toolkit. Among the Chumash, adzes were made from shell, less common than stone in Polynesia, but prevalent in some island groups. Coincidentally, Polynesian shell adzes are a topic of the paper by Ernest Winterhoff in this edition of the *Rapa Nui Journal*. This implies not the accidental appearance of an empty canoe, but a visit long enough to include lessons in the techniques and tools of its construction, just as the acquisition of the sweet potato must have involved some instruction in planting.

Appearing at the same time in the Chumash archaeological record as evidence for the sewn-plank canoe are two-piece bone fishhooks. Both the Chumash and the Polynesians used very similar shellfish hooks as well, but the evidence in that case actually suggests independent invention. These two technologies, the sewn-plank canoe and the two-piece hook, are linked in the archaeological record with a major increase in the amounts of pelagic fish remains such as swordfish and tuna, and with an increase in social complexity that made the Chumash unique among the many southern California tribes.

Equally, if not more compelling, is their linguistic data, primarily Klar's contribution. Unlike previous linguistic arguments for Polynesian-American connections, which were shallow and sloppy, Jones and Klar present a tightly constructed case that the Chumash word for the sewn-plank canoe, which they reconstruct in its earliest form as *tomolo*, actually derives from a Polynesian construction: *tumu raa'au*, a phrase they suggest probably meant "useful wood." Why not some form of *waka*, the ubiquitous Polynesian word for boat? The Chumash already had a word for boat. Here again, the proposed derivation points not so much to the artifact as to the technology, supporting the argument for actual cultural contact and an emphasis on the construction of the sewn-plank canoe. As the authors emphasize, the word itself is artifact here. Their argument gains particular weight from the fact that *tomolo* is morphologically and etymologically opaque in Chumash; that